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Kissinger Urged China to Free Captives

PRISONERS, From A1
Intelligence Agency operation engaged in setting up guerrilla bases in northeast China.

Convicted by the Chinese in 1954, Fecteau was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment and Downey was given a life term. Downey was scheduled for release next year. Downey's commutation will make him eligible for release in five years.

Announcing the changes in their sentences, Peking's official New China News Agency said on Sunday that the "two captives" had "admitted their mistakes during their trials and their behavior was not bad while serving their terms."

Miss Harbert was arrested by the Chinese in 1966 when she and a companion, Gerald Rosa McLaughlin, drifted into China's waters off southern Kwangtung Province while sailing their yacht from Hong Kong to Manila.

The New China News Agency said on Sunday that Miss Harbert's release followed the conversion of her mistakes. The agency revealed, however, that McLaughlin had committed suicide in March, 1969, adding that he had "behaved badly, resisted investigation" and taken "the warders unawares."



John Downey, left, whose life sentence was commuted by Peking, and Richard Fecteau, who was released.

Believed Lost at Sea
The Chinese had not disclosed the arrest of the couple prior to their announcement of Miss Harbert's release on Sunday. Until then, they were presumed to have been lost at sea.

Two other American prisoners still being held in China are Air Force Maj. Philip E. Smith, whose F-104 went down over southern Hainan Island in September, 1965, and Navy Lt. Robert J. Flynn, a crew member aboard an A-1 that crashed over China's southernmost province of Kwangsi in August, 1967.

Some sources believe that the two U.S. military men were captured in connection with missions in the Vietnam area. The sources will not say whether they will be released.

on American POWs now held by North Vietnam.

Among the other U.S. citizens being detained in China are Americans who sympathized with the Communist regime and ran afoul of its political zigzags. These include Sydney Rittenberg, a propagandist in Peking who joined the Red Guards during Mao Tse-tung's Cultural Revolution and was later accused of "ultra-leftism."

Praises President

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) called the release of the Americans "one of the most important symbols of the emerging era of improved relations between our two countries." Kennedy said further that the President "deserves the highest praise" for securing their release.

In Lynn, Mass., one of Fecteau's twin daughters posted a hand-lettered sign on a garage door, reading: "My Dad's Home at Last." Fecteau and

his wife, Mrs. Margaret Fecteau, were divorced in 1951.

Mary Ann Harbert's sister, Mrs. Sue Carrington of Mountain View, Calif., said on hearing the news: "We're walking on air."

In Washington, meanwhile, a cousin of John T. Downey has asked Mr. Nixon to urge the Chinese leaders when he visits Peking in February to release Downey under presidential custody.

Sean Downey of McLean, Va., expressed the belief in an interview yesterday that the Chinese might free his cousin if the President concedes that Downey was indeed a CIA operative when he was captured. "That approach would give the Chinese an opportunity to 'save face,'" Downey explained.

Talks in Ottawa

Downey said that the Chinese ambassador to Canada, Huang Hua, had indicated during a conversation they had in Ottawa in October that John Downey's chances of release might be improved if the United States acknowledged that he had been working for the CIA.

Harvard Law School Prof. Jerome A. Cohen made a similar proposal to the White House in July after discussing the prisoner issue with Chinese diplomats in Canada. Cohen, who was a classmate of Downey at Yale, said at the time that his suggestion had received "working-level" endorsement within the administration.

It is not known whether Kissinger conceded in his conversations that Fecteau and Downey had been CIA employees. But Cohen, an expert in Chinese law, has been in occasional contact with Kissinger.